

HACKNEY HECKLER

FREE

TAKING THINGS ONE STEP FURTHER

No.3 JUNE 1990

A POLL TAX SPECIAL

BURN THOSE BILLS!

The Government's attempt to introduce the Poll Tax is in big trouble as millions of people say "Poll Tax - No Way!" The principle of the Poll Tax is that everyone pays the same amount. So a company director on £300,000 a year, living in a mansion, will pay exactly the same as the people who work in his factory.

WILL WE PAY? WILL WE XXXX!

Hackney's Poll Tax is £499 per person. Hackney is the second poorest borough in the country and yet we are being told to cough up one of the highest amounts of Poll Tax. There are two reasons why the Poll Tax is being forced upon us. Firstly it's a straightforward case of taking money from the poor and stuffing it in the pockets of the rich. Most of us are worse off under the Poll Tax - 73% according to the Government's own statistics. But a few are better off, like Maggie and Denis Thatcher who will save £1,500 a year. And the rich big business supporters of the Tory Party will each be thousands of pounds better off. Secondly it's a way of making further drastic cuts and redundancies in our much needed services as the Council slashes its budget to try and keep the Poll Tax level down. Hackney Council has already cut by £10 million and there's more to come. The services we get at the moment aren't exactly great but after the Poll Tax they'll be virtually non-existent. We are faced with the prospect of trying to find the money to pay huge bills we can't afford and losing Council services we can't do without. Now is the time to organise together to fight this vicious attack on our class.

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN.

Millions of people all over the country are saying "enough is enough - we're not paying!" After a year of the Poll Tax in Scotland up to 1 million people haven't paid a penny or are in serious arrears. And in England there was an enormous demonstration of over 200,000 against the Poll Tax on March



**People burning their bills,
Clissold Park.**

31st. It's by action together that we have the power to stop the Poll Tax. We must organise for mass non-payment of the Tax, by joining our local anti-Poll Tax group, talking to our neighbours and workmates, putting a No Poll Tax poster in the window and so on. Council workers are in a good position to hit the Poll Tax - by boycotting Poll Tax work, offering advice to local anti-Poll Tax groups and of course by all out strike action against cuts in services. Many DHSS workers have already decided that they won't remove money from the giro of claimants who refuse to pay. By acting together in the workplace and in the local community we have the power to smash the Poll Tax.

LABOUR PARTY? WHAT LABOUR PARTY!

During the fight ahead we won't just find ourselves up against the Government and their courts. The leaders of the Labour Party, the unions and the councils are just as opposed to mass independent working class action as the Government is. The threat of the Mass Non-payment campaign controled from the grass roots, is enough to unite these hypocrites in opposition to it. Well we can't trust them and we don't need them. We also have to contend with

those who want to use our struggle against the Poll Tax for their own purposes. We can't allow party activists to take control of local anti-Poll Tax groups because they'll stitch us up if it suits their party politics. What we need are groups organised on non-party lines where every one has an equal say - street based groups of neighbours with regular open meetings, where we can decide on the actions needed to beat the Poll Tax.

LET'S STICK TOGETHER!

In Scotland the number of people not paying has been steadily growing in the last year. The same level of resistance in England and Wales would mean 10 million people not paying! So it's no surprise that the Government is in a panic about the Poll Tax and is trying to scare people into paying with threats or fines and bailiffs. But if stick together and support each other against Government threats then they haven't got a chance of forcing the Poll Tax on us. In Scotland almost every attempt by Bailiffs to cease peoples' possessions has been stopped by the actions of well organised anti-Poll Tax groups. Here in Hackney the council have estimated that they'll need at least 366 court days to deal with all of us non-payers - but they over worked courts could only offer them twelve days. Mass Non-payment will clog up the courts and make collection of the Poll Tax virtually impossible.

WHO ARE THE CRIMINALS?

The Government and the Tory press have tried to make criminals out of the anti-Poll Tax movement, especially since the street fighting with the riot police around Trafalgar after the March 31st demonstration. Their aim is to divide and discredit the anti-Poll Tax campaign, but we all know it's the Poll Tax that's criminal not us. It's vital that we show our solidarity with the arrested protestors by fully supporting the **TRAFALGAR SQUARE DEFENDANTS CAMPAIGN.**

Full Details On Back Page...

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE

Many councils are telling people that not paying the Poll Tax will lead to awful punishments, even jail. How true is their threat? In this article we will look at the powers the councils have in trying to recover Poll Tax debts and, more importantly, what we can do to foil their efforts.

BILLING AND COLLECTION

First you will receive a form which offers you a choice of how you wish to pay your tax. If you do not indicate a preferred method of payment you will be sent a Poll Tax payment book divided into ten equal monthly instalments to pay the full year's Poll Tax minus any rebate entitlement if a rebate has been claimed.

REMINDER NOTICES

If a Poll Tax instalment is unpaid on the due date, in theory, a reminder notice should be sent. There is no specified period between the date the instalment falls due and the issue of the reminder note. Looking at the situation in Scotland this is hardly surprising.

In Scotland the system of billing and collection is in chaos. Four months after the first Poll Tax bills were due some 300,000 had still to receive payment books. Where bills were sent, there were often sent to the wrong address and in some cases sent to children and the dead! Thousands of rebate claims are flooding into Scottish councils daily. But, most of all, the one million Scots who have refused to pay have proved the biggest obstacle yet to the successful introduction of the tax. Any English or Welsh council which thinks it can issue reminders and penalties within a month of the first bills lives in cloud cuckoo land.

Any reminder will instruct you to pay an unpaid Poll Tax instalment within seven days. If the instalment is not paid within this time, you will lose the right to pay in instalments and the full year's Poll Tax will fall due within a further seven days.

LIABILITY ORDERS

At any time after you have missed instalments and a full year's Poll Tax

has become due, the council can issue you with a summons to appear before a magistrate's court. At this stage it is a civil, not a criminal, offence. The police are not involved and you don't get a criminal record. If the court decides in the council's favour it'll issue you with a liability order demanding payment of the full year's Poll Tax plus an amount towards legal costs.

A mass non-payment campaign would create an immovable log-jam of cases at a time when civil debt cases for fuel, water rates, etc will be flooding into courts, which are barely handling their case loads at the moment. Organised mass non-payment will completely engulf the council and the courts. The Chief Executive of Hackney Council will need at least 366 court days a year to deal with all of us non-payers - but the court could only offer him 12 days! Faced with this, the Poll Tax could fall at the first fence.

It must also be stressed that the clerks in the courts and the computer operators are not very highly paid and will be facing big Poll Tax bills themselves. Refusal by them to handle non-payment cases which in a mass campaign would make their workload intolerable, would make the Poll Tax penalties unworkable.

INFORMATION

Let's assume the Poll Tax comes this far and a liability order is issued. The council now has the powers to demand information from you about your income, your place of work, where you get any other income from and possibly where you keep most of your possessions. Failure to respond to such demands for information is a criminal offence punishable by a fine of £100 (£400 for giving false information).

It is up the council now and not the courts to choose which method it wishes to use to recover a Poll Tax debt. All its options are shown below. It can only pursue one of them at a time. And, what is more, the council cannot get anyone to work in the

recovery section of the Poll Tax office. Hardly surprising really - who would want to work there!



FREEZING BANK ACCOUNTS

Unlike in Scotland, there is no power to freeze bank accounts in England and Wales, so mortgage payments are unaffected. They can't touch any savings.

INCOME SUPPORT

The council can issue an order to the local Social Security office to deduct Poll Tax arrears from your income support. No other benefits, such as sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, invalidity benefit or retirement pensions, can be touched. The limit (and remember this is only for income support) is £1.75 a week for a single person and £2.75 for a couple. If a person's Income Support has been reduced by direct payment deductions (ie for fuel debts or Social Fund loans) or benefit has been part suspended, then a deduction cannot be made.

A mass campaign of non-payment will swamp the DSS office with claims for Poll Tax deductions. The people expected to administer such claims will be low paid Civil Service workers, members of unions like the CPSA and NUCAPS who have already taken strike action due to poor staffing and over work. If these workers refuse to process such deductions then the unemployed and others who have most to lose from the Poll Tax will be able to play a full part in a Poll Tax strike. This means another avenue will be closed as far as penalties are concerned.

ATTACHMENT OF EARNINGS

After a liability order is issued, the

DON'T PAY THE POLL TAX?

council can attempt to recover a Poll Tax debt by issuing an attachment of earnings order to an employer, ordering them to deduct set amounts from a worker's wages. For example, if your take home pay is £100 a week, the most they can deduct is £9 a week plus £1 towards your employer's costs. Employers are unhappy about doing this. A big company might have to make payments to up to 400 councils, causing in the words of 'Personnel Today' (an employer's magazine), "pay roll havoc". The 'Financial Times' has warned of "potentially disastrous consequences for industry and commerce."

Problems may arise if an attachment of earnings is considered grounds for dismissal especially in poorly organised workplaces. However, Poll Tax non-payment is not industrial misconduct and should not be grounds for dismissal. The threat of industrial action is a powerful deterrent to any employer trying to sack people because of wage arrearments. Action on the industrial front against the Poll Tax received a major boost in January when 17,000 council workers in Leicester voted in favour of industrial action if the council tried to issue any redundancies because of Poll Tax driven service cuts. In Stockbridge/New Town in Scotland the local anti-Poll Tax group has successfully campaigned against a rumour at the Cameron Toll Sava Centre that all workers who had their wages arrested would be sacked. In the end the Sava Centre had to respond by writing to all its workers stating that this would definitely not be the case. And in Edinburgh a group of council workers are amongst the latest to announce plans to mount walkouts if any employee is penalised for non-payment of the Poll Tax.

DISTRESS [BALIFFS]

After a liability order is issued one option for the council is to use its own private baliffs to value possessions, then sell them at an auction to pay the Poll Tax debts plus costs. Baliffs will not be able to take all possessions - vital household goods, including bedding, cooking equipment, children's toys, learning and studying materials etc. The first £100 of clothing and £150 of tools are not considered either. The most common goods considered for auction are videos, TVs and stereo equipment. You can arrange a time and place for the baliffs to visit you and value your possessions. Goods on HP or belonging to other people (including recent 'sales' to neighbours can't be taken. Once you've moved out any luxury items to a friend or a neighbour for the day there is nothing much to

worry about. Using baliffs is a strategy that relies on fear. In 1977 the county courts issued over 1 million warrants for baliffs but only 3,000 were carried out. Nearly everybody paid up, most likely borrowing money to do so. In Scotland no attempted 'poinding' (valuation of goods) has ever been successful. Poll Tax campaigners have organised physical blockades. These have been followed by angry lobbies of Town Halls calling for the end of this method of debt recovery. Such blockades are not the business of the police to intervene in, unless a breach of the peace is caused, which is unlikely if a few baliffs are facing 300 people. The chances of councils using baliffs on a large scale are very small. In addition to our street reps, we can build a network of telephone numbers to arrange a blockade at short notice should baliffs arrive.

IMPRISONMENT

This is the penalty about which most scaremongering has been put out. Unlike in Scotland, the jail penalty for Poll Tax non-payment still exists, but only as a frightener and as an absolute last resort. The law clearly states that imprisonment for non-payment can only be recommended when all other attempts at recovery have failed. The council could then recommend that a warrant be taken out committing that person to jail. The court would consider whether non-payment was due to wilful refusal or simple neglect. Maximum sentence is 3 months and payment would release you immediately.

CONCLUSION

If the council should succeed in crossing all the hurdles of implementing the tax and our campaign proves unsuccessful, then Poll Tax strikers would have a price to pay. In most cases that price would be the full year's Poll Tax plus an amount towards court costs. In Scotland this adds up to around £15 if unemployed and £50-£60 if working. Therefore an unsuccessful Poll Tax strike would in most cases cost £60 on top of the Poll Tax you would have to pay if there was

no campaign. But everything indicates that non-payment will be successful!

In Scotland over 1 million people - 30% of the population - have either avoided the register altogether, paid nothing or are seriously in arrears. In fact the level of non-payment is growing! If the same figures are applied to England and Wales there will be over 10 million non-payers. It is a movement that is not about to collapse or fizzle out. People in Scotland have realised that, with the council's administrative machinery in chaos, then threatening to seriously take on non-payment is nothing but a joke.

The idea that the same councils who even now don't know exactly how many people aren't paying, because their computers are not yet sorted out to count them properly, could take thousands of people to court, order thousands of wage or benefits arrearments or issue thousands of



baliffs' warrants is plain laughable. Their strategy is to frighten people into paying; they know full well that it is impossible to force the money out of millions of non-payers. In Scotland councils could still be chasing people who have not paid this year in five years time! It would take baliffs 80 years just to visit all those in arrears!

COPY THIS ARTICLE, AND PASS IT ON!

GETTING ORGANISED

A list of Anti-Poll Tax groups and Unions set up in Hackney so far which meet regularly;

Clapton George 533-3279 Holmleigh Rd. Area Norman 809-7228 Homerton. Kevin 533-3390 Jack Dunning/Bannister Louise 985-5321 Kings Park Lisa 986-8062 Lordship Shaun 809-6053 Pembury Andrew 985-7642 Shacklewell J.Langram 249-0472 Wick. Colin 533-3315 Victoria Alvin 533-3879	Mount Tenants Ass. Hall Mount Pleasant Lane. Oaktree Community Centre. Bethune Rd. Chats Palace. Brooksby Walk. Tenants Ass. Hall. Jack Dunning Estate Wally Foster Centre Homerton Rd. Ring for venue. Tenants Ass. Hall. Pembury Estate. Ring for venue. White Lion pub. Wick Rd. Ring For Info.	2nd&4th Tues. Monthly, Last Monday. Fortnightly. Ring First. Fortnightly. Ring first. 2nd&4th Thursday. Monthly. Fortnightly. From June 11. Fortnightly. Fortnightly. Tuesdays. Monthly.
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Those groups meeting occasionally;

Amhurst 249-3322, Brooke Rd 806-8146, Durlston 806-8304,
Forburg Rd. 806-1630, Haggerston 241-6493, Hoxton 739-3459,
Kings Cres. 800-2801, Morningside/Trelawney 986-0160,
Nightingale 254-0770, Olinda Rd. 809-2641, Stamford Hill East 806-0250

Stamford Hill Estate 806-8186, Stoke Newington 241-1158, Trees
800-2801, Woodberry Down 800-4082, Whiston/Goldsmith 739-9705

If you need further info, advice or are interested in setting up a group in your area, street or estate contact;

HACKNEY AGAINST THE POLL TAX FEDERATION, meets monthly, 3rd Tuesday at the Fire Station, 61 Leswin Rd. N.16 or tel. 0426-911161 (24hr ans. phone)

TRAFALGAR, TIANANMEN- SAME RICE,DIFFERENT CHOPSTICKS!

TRAFALGAR SQUARE DEFENDANTS CAMPAIGN.

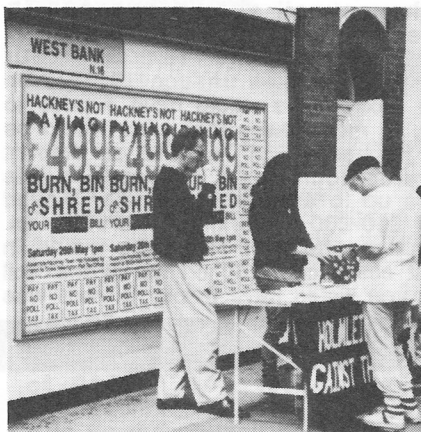
The National defence campaign for all those arrested as a result of the 200,000+ strong Anti-Poll Tax demonstration on March 31st.

c/o Haldane Socceity of Lawyers,Panther House,38 Mount Pleasant,London WC1X OAP.Tel:071-833-8958 (Answer machine).

WE'RE GOING TO WIN!

Only by getting together with our neighbours and workmates can we stop the Poll Tax. We must join together home to home, estate to estate, street to street, workplace to workplace and all across the country to smash this hated tax. Solidarity can defeat the Poll Tax.

LET'S GET ORGANISED.



Hackney's getting organised.

ATTENTION OAP'S

Pensioners will be particularly hit by the poll tax. Even if they get full rebate (which many of them won't) they will still be worse off. With the rising cost of living this will only make things harder for older people.

OUR MESSAGE IS

◆ to any pensioners who can't or won't pay: "We'll support you 100%"

◆ don't worry about threats from the council. We'll make sure no one is left isolated.

◆ we want as many people as possible not to pay. The more people not paying the quicker we'll get rid of the poll tax!

◆ for many people it will be the first time they've contemplated breaking the law. This time young and old will be standing together saying "We don't want your poll tax!"

HACKNEY HECKLER is a bimonthly free news-sheet produced by **HACKNEY SOLIDARITY GROUP** We all live or work in the borough and are sick of what we see around us. That's the aim of the **HECKLER**: to encourage struggle for a decent life for all. We welcome contributions, donations, reports and help with distribution (we currently get rid of 10,000). What's happening on your estate? Which councillors are corrupt? Who's the worst boss in Hackney? Write to us at **HACKNEY HECKLER**, c/o 61 Leswin Road, N16 or come to our weekly meeting, every Tuesday, 7.30pm at the Old Fire Station, Leswin Road.

Next issue: August.